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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

## MEMORANDUM

### *The Situation in Vietnam*

State Dept. review completed

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Information as of 1600  
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HIGHLIGHTS

North Vietnam is making a concerted effort to underscore the importance of recent statements by DRV officials regarding Hanoi's reaction to an "unconditional cessation of bombings" by the US.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:  
Operation PRAIRIE has ended and was immediately followed by Operation PRAIRIE II; a total of 1,397 Communists have been killed since PRAIRIE began on 3 August (Paras. 1-3). Two South Korean operations have accounted for 149 Communists killed since 21 January (Para. 4). Five US Army battalions have begun Operation BIG SPRING in the western portion of Communist War Zone "D" in Binh Duong Province (Para. 5). There continue to be reports of Viet Cong plans to attack Chu Lai and Tan Son Nhut Airfield before Tet (the lunar new year) (Paras. 6-7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:  
A trip by a Vietnamese journalist to a Viet Cong - controlled area during the New Year's truce has touched off some speculation in Saigon that the government is getting ready to negotiate with the Viet Cong (Para. 1).

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the government did not grant permission for the visit (Para. 2). Although retired General Tran Van Don recently told a US Embassy officer that he is not a candidate for president, Don has been politically active and is probably trying to make the most of his opportunities (Paras. 3-4).

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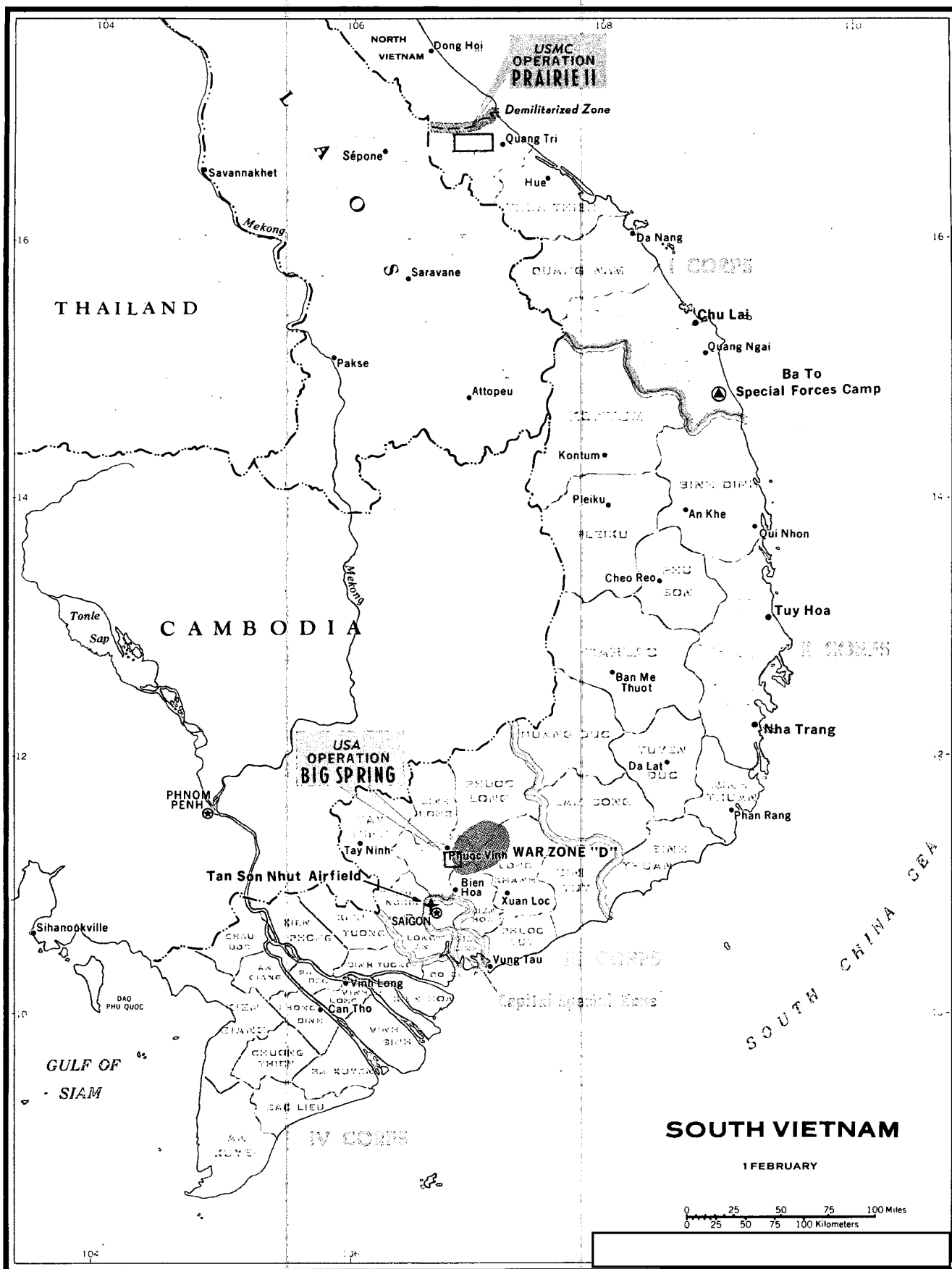
III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:  
There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:  
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: North Vietnam is continuing its efforts to underscore recent statements on its reaction to a US bombing halt (Paras. 1-2). A French official interprets these recent DRV statements as possibly indicating a shift of attitude in Hanoi (Para. 3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The four-battalion US Marine Operation PRAIRIE ended on 31 January and was immediately followed by the initiation of Operation PRAIRIE II. Operation PRAIRIE II will operate in the same area of northernmost Quang Tri Province, immediately south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The mission also remains the same--search for and destroy the men, positions, and logistical support areas of the estimated 7,200-man North Vietnamese force that is believed to be operating in and near the DMZ. The command post of the 324B North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Division, elements of three enemy regiments, and other enemy units have been recently identified in the area.

2. Operation PRAIRIE began immediately following the termination on 3 August of Operation HASTINGS, which killed 882 enemy soldiers in 30 days and undoubtedly accounted in great measure for the withdrawal into North Vietnam of the 324B NVA Division.

3. Final casualty figures for the six-month-long Operation PRAIRIE show 225 Americans killed and 1,159 wounded as compared with Communist losses of 1,397 killed and 25 captured. The operation was supported by a total of 5,183 tactical air strikes, 246 B-52 sorties, and 223 naval gunfire missions.

Other Allied Operations

4. Two South Korean Army (ROK) local security operations, both conducted by elements of the 9th ROK Division, have killed a total of 149 Communist soldiers and captured 47 since 21 January. According to delayed reports, one of the operations is being conducted 11 miles south of Tuy Hoa in Phu Yen Province and the other in an area about 17 miles northwest of Nha Trang in coastal Khanh Hoa Province. Korean casualties in these operations total three killed and eight wounded.

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5. Five US Army battalions have begun Operation BIG SPRING in an area about 29 miles north-northeast of Saigon in Binh Duong Province. This search-and-destroy operation is designed to locate and destroy Viet Cong forces and installations in the western portion of Communist War Zone "D". The Phu Loi Viet Cong (VC) battalion, a battalion of the 165A VC Regiment, and two battalions of the 27th VC Regiment--totaling an estimated 1,650 men--are reported to be in the area of this sweep operation.

#### Viet Cong Plans For Tet Attacks

6. A recent rallier [ ] has revealed a possible plan for an attack against the US Marine installation at Chu Lai in coastal Quang Tin Province. The attack is said to be scheduled some time between 3 and 5 February as a "Tet gift to Ho Chi Minh." Three suicide teams of 12 to 16 men each will attempt to destroy US aircraft and to mortar the regimental camp area. At the same time, other units [ ] have plans to attack the Ba To Special Forces Camp in Quang Ngai Province.

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7. US military officials in Saigon continue to receive reports of Communist plans to attack Tan Son Nhut airbase northwest of Saigon prior to Tet, 8-12 February. A recent report indicates that the 7th Battalion of the 165A VC Regiment will launch mortar strikes against the installation on 5-6 February to cover the attempts of a suicide team to penetrate the base. Security officials have taken appropriate action to ensure maximum protection for the base during the pre-Tet period.

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## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Nam Dinh, a leading member of the Association of Saigon Newspaper Owners, visited a Viet Cong - controlled area of Long An Province during the New Year's truce to interview inhabitants. Nam's visit has become generally known in Saigon, and apparently has given rise to speculation that the Vietnamese Government is engaged in establishing a contact with the Viet Cong for the purpose of discussing peace negotiations.

2. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the government canceled permission for Nam's trip, and that Nam went through with the visit on his own. Vu Ngoc Cac, the president of the Association of Saigon Newspaper Owners, has indicated that the government will probably not approve any overt press visits to Viet Cong areas during the Tet truce beginning on 8 February. Nam himself will probably not take a second independent visit for fear of government reprisal.

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### General Tran Van Don Discusses Presidential Possibilities

3. General Tran Van Don, a leading figure in the Minh junta that overthrew Diem, recently told a US Embassy official that he definitely is not a candidate for president of the future constitutional government. Don commented that he could not hope to win without the amounts of money and organization that are available to the current military leaders. He said that he expected both Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu to be candidates, and that he was planning to support Ky. Among other things, Don denied that he had any contacts with Tri Quang or the militant Buddhists, and that he felt that General Co's recent dismissal was a good move that would not cause any reaction among southerners.

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4. US Embassy officials continue to feel that Don would like to be president, and there is evidence that Don has at least been feeling out potential supports and assessing his chances. It is possible that he has concluded already that he could not win, and might be attempting to trade what support he has for a position in the future government. However, embassy officials are inclined to feel that the amount of support that Don could bring to someone else's candidacy would be only marginal.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. North Vietnam is making a concerted effort to underscore the importance of recent statements by its representative in Paris, Mai Van Bo, and by Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh regarding Hanoi's reaction to an "unconditional cessation of the bombings" by the US.

2. In one instance, the DRV Foreign Ministry called in the heads of all diplomatic missions and read to them the text of the foreign minister's interview with Wilfred Burchett.

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3. A French interpretation of these recent statements was provided the US Embassy in Paris by M. Manac'h, the chief of the Asian affairs section of the French foreign office. The French official claimed that he had recently discussed Trinh's statement with Mai Van Bo and as a result of that conversation came to believe that North Vietnam "may be agreeable to approaching a solution to the Vietnam problem in a different manner than heretofore." Manac'h interpreted this new approach to mean that instead of holding talks on Vietnam as a whole, Hanoi may be thinking in terms of dividing problems into three parts: US-DRV relations, US - South Vietnamese relations, and US relations with Vietnam as a whole. Manac'h stated it was his belief that the recent remarks by Bo and Trinh indicated Hanoi would be willing to discuss the first point provided the US stopped the bombings. Manac'h speculated that such a move could be a face-saving way for the DRV to hold talks without insisting on its four-point program as a basis for discussion. These four points would, nevertheless, remain applicable for discussion of Vietnam as a whole.

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